



Eleventh-grade student Nino Kajaia.

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### **Stansbury student is a winner in state's radon poster contest**

A Stansbury High School student was among five winners chosen in the state's annual radon poster contest.

This was only the second year Tooele County schools participated in the contest, said Taylor Palmer, environmental health scientist for the county health department.

"I know this year the state received over 500 posters, so it's pretty cool that one of the winners came from Tooele County," he said.

The Utah Department of Environmental Quality holds a poster contest each fall to help educate people about radon, an invisible, radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer when inhaled over long periods of time, said Eleanor Divver, coordinator for the DEQ's Indoor Radon Program.

"[We have a poster contest] because then our youngest citizens can help us spread the word that it's important for all residents in Utah to test their home for radon," she said in a DEQ broadcast on Nov. 8.

All Utah students aged 9-18 can participate in the contest. DEQ officials award \$100 to each winner and their school. Winners will also meet Gov. Gary Herbert in January, Utah's Radon Action Month. Divver was impressed with the poster submitted by Nino Kajaia, an exchange student from the Republic of Georgia at Stansbury High School. Kajaia's poster includes information about radon as well as an illustration of how radon can affect families over time.

"This poster here has really done a great job of focusing on the emotional impact that radon would

have on a family,” she said. “You can see here the family is healthy and happy and living together, but the home had radon and so with those elevated levels the father passed away from lung cancer and now the family is sad and missing their father.”

Radon gas is created naturally as deposits of uranium in the soil break down. It can be drawn into homes because a house is usually warmer than the surrounding soil, meaning it has lower air pressure.

The gas usually enters a house through spaces between basement walls, cracks in foundations, or wall openings around sump pumps and drains, construction joints, crawl spaces, showers and well water with high radon concentrations. A house could have elevated radon levels regardless of its age, according to the DEQ.

“Radon is going to get into your house even if you don’t have a basement,” Divver said. “It can potentially get into your home in high enough levels that it can be dangerous. ... It’s the second leading cause of lung cancer next to smoking and for nonsmokers it’s the leading cause of lung cancer.”

In Utah, approximately one in three homes have elevated radon levels, she said.

“That is why it’s so critical [that people test their homes] and we’re so appreciative of our young citizens for spreading the message,” Divver said.

People can test their homes for radon gas by conducting a do-it-yourself test. Tests can be purchased online at [radon.utah.gov](http://radon.utah.gov) or in person at the Tooele County Health Department, hardware stores or retail outlets.

If purchased through the state, test kits start at \$8.95. But the local health department, located at 151 N. Main Street in Tooele, is offering kits to residents for \$5, Palmer said.

The test takes about 60 hours to perform. The house is sealed for 12 hours, after which the test instrument is opened and left in place for at least 48 hours.

“It’s definitely worth the \$5 to test your home,” Palmer said.

If the test results indicate radon levels are high, the DEQ encourages homeowners to mitigate the radon gas and fix their home.

“The cost is \$1,500 to mitigate the home and fix it and the mitigators are willing to let you pay on a monthly rate over a year,” Divver said.

A list of certified contractors is available on [radon.utah.gov](http://radon.utah.gov). Currently, state law does not require landlords to pay to test for radon gas or mitigate it. Instead, residents have that responsibility, according to the DEQ.

Rather than hire a contractor to mitigate radon gas, homeowners can choose to install a radon mitigation system, which range between \$1,200 and \$1,500, Palmer said.

“It does cost some money, but it’s relatively inexpensive when it comes to not having to get lung cancer,” he said.



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